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STATE FOR SCA/FO (DAS GASTRIGHT), SCA/A  
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/CDHA/DG  
NSC FOR HARRIMAN  
OSD FOR KIMMETT  
CENTCOM FOR CSTC-A, CG CJTF-76, POLAD  
REL NATO/ISAF/NZ/AUS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [SOCI](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: PRT CHAGHCHARAN: SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT ON SECURITY,  
POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SITUATION IN GHOR PROVINCE

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Ghor Province should be one of Afghanistan's success stories, but because it remains unable to attract the resources needed to overcome its developmental deficit, the province continues to lack the wherewithal for economic and political "take-off". Marginal progress was made over the last six months on some fronts, and, very importantly, a food crisis appears to have been averted. What is more, there is widespread appreciation throughout the province for its relative peace and security, which residents realize from listening to the radio contrasts markedly with the situation in the south and east. On the other hand, that same medium is fueling the belief -- and resultant unhappiness -- that Kabul and the International Community are largely ignoring Ghor's needs while addressing those of other provinces. Perhaps not coincidentally, there have been a number of serious security incidents since last summer. These reflect, among other things, the inability of legitimate government authority to neutralize competing tribal- arms-, and crime-based centers of power, some of which are willing to do the Taliban's bidding. End summary.

#### Security

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¶2. (SBU) It is all but impossible to find a Ghor resident who does not thank his or her lucky stars that the security situation in the province is so much better than in many other parts of the country. Ghor's relative peace has several, sometimes paradoxical sources: its largely Tajik population, still quietly armed and ready to resist the Taliban; the difficult terrain, harsh climate, and lack of good transit routes; the watchful eye of an active but non-aggressive PRT; and, perhaps most importantly, the delicate balance between the province's competing centers of power (legitimate and illegitimate), which rarely comes under direct challenge. The security climate in Chaghcharan, the provincial capital, is so permissive that UNAMA now plans to open an office there in the spring. Just before Christmas the contrast between Ghor and those parts of the country suffering ongoing hostilities was thrown into especially stark relief with the arrival at PRT Chaghcharan of a U.S. Army Police Support Team (PST), complete with fresh combat

experience, more restrictive yet robust operating procedures than the other PRT elements, and a certain initial unfamiliarity to encountering smiling and waving adults and kids along the road.

¶3. (SBU) There is, however, another side to the story. The PRT headquarters has not come under RPG fire again, as it did last May, but a Croatian patrol operating near Ghor's border with Helmand and Farah was targeted by direct small arms fire in late June and narrowly avoided casualties. The French NGO "Mission d'Aide au Développement des Economies Rurales en Afghanistan" (MADERA), for years the backbone of the NGO community's presence in Ghor's southern districts, has yet to return its international staff to the area following the RPG and small arms attack on its premises in Pasaband last May. ¶25. On May 31 the administrative center in Saghar district, again on Ghor's southern border, was attacked. One week earlier the district administrator in Shahrak was killed, followed in October by the murder of the head of the important Palawan tribe in the district. Back on July 23 an Afghan doctor working for World Vision and his driver were murdered north of Chaghcharan in Charsada district. Two weeks later a World Food Program (WFP) truck was attacked nearby. On August 24 the Pasaband police station came under RPG and small arms fire. At almost the same time, three tent schools in neighboring Taiwara were attacked. Finally, on November 23 prominent Mullah Sarwarjan from Taiwara district, known for having opposed Taliban propaganda, was killed at a Taliban checkpoint in northern Helmand Province.

¶4. (SBU) The circumstances of many of these acts of violence remain murky. Reports suggest they had their origins variously in criminality, family or tribal disputes,

KABUL 00000790 002 OF 005

jockeying for power among competing strongmen, simple shows of force, and/or ideologically or monetarily motivated support for the Taliban. What they all clearly demonstrate is the limited reach of legitimate state authority. Of at least equal concern are the repeated warnings voiced since late last year by local officials responsible for tracking Ghor's security situation that individual acts of violence may now be in the planning stages, intended not just for the province's periphery.

#### Politics

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¶5. (SBU) Political institutions in Ghor are formally up and running, but they remain in the "sputtering" stage, as likely to grind to a halt as finally kick into high gear. The one real exception is Governor Afzali, who doggedly continues to push for real policy outcomes in the face of obstacles at every turn. In one telling incident a few months back, when word was slow to get out that he had returned from Kabul, Afzali began looking for government workers in their offices and, finding those offices empty, promptly locked the relevant doors. Before long there was quite the crowd of displaced civil servants on his doorstep. On more than one occasion, the Governor has declared publicly that, if people are content to snipe at him instead of working for real progress, then he would be just as content to move back to Kabul. Privately he remains genuinely concerned at the lack of what he feels are the resources needed to do an effective job. He has received, for example, only a fraction of the funds he has sought to keep the main transport routes open during the winter, a campaign he personally has taken in hand with repeated visits to the affected mountain passes.

¶6. (SBU) Still in its inaugural year, the Provincial Council is trying to find its way. The ill-will that characterized relations with the Governor early on has been replaced, thanks to outside mediation, with a rudimentary workman like relationship. The Council meets with the Governor at least once a week now, sends a representative to most larger-scale government-sponsored events, and on occasion seeks information from various department heads. Like most

institutions of all sorts in Ghor, the Council is severely short on human capital (it is rumored to include warlords, relatives of warlords, and drug traffickers). After one of the PRT's poloffs recently devoted an afternoon to suggesting to the PC Chairman a possible way ahead for the sub-group on human rights and good governance, which the PC Chairman heads, the Chairman arrived an hour late for the actual subcommittee meeting, in time to sign off on the conclusions that the PRT poloff had been compelled to extract - for want of anyone else willing to push discussion -- from the participants.

¶7. (U) In the absence of any ANA presence in Ghor, even the limited progress on the police front over last six months is noteworthy. The ANP in Ghor, though permanently present only in district centers with a total force (officers, enlisted, civilians) of 923 as of January 2007, remains the only available "pointy end" of governmental authority. Having set his house in order with the Ministry of Interior, Police Chief General Noori has over the last month come out from under the cloud of probation and returned to the job demonstrating greater engagement as a partner with the PRT's Dyncorps mentors (and their PST support team) and Lithuanian police trainers.

¶8. (SBU) Dyncorps continues to do its best to turn even illiterate recruits into functioning policemen in 13 weeks, to drag police officialdom into properly supporting police pay reform, and to call up the infinite patience required to bring a functioning Provincial Coordination Center (PCC) into being. The Lithuanians also continue their yeomen's work, building up the provincial ANP's radio transmitting capabilities practically from scratch, furnishing the most

KABUL 00000790 003 OF 005

basic elements of mobility (motorbikes), and offering the first forensic training since the Soviet occupation. The PRT's military element recently began supplemental weapons training for the police and is gearing up to cover a significant part of the curriculum that must be taught in order to stand up Ghor's 150-strong auxiliary police force contingent.

#### Economy

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¶9. (U) Ghor's economy made scant progress over the last six months. Government revenues are expected to amount to a paltry \$200,000 for the year ending in March. Retail activity in the capital was lively enough over the summer, though perhaps not to the extent city authorities may have anticipated (as evidenced by the number of municipal-owned shop stalls left only half-built). Over the winter, sales have stagnated due to the seasonal drop-off in customers from outlying villages. The province continues to have virtually no commercial enterprises. Transport "companies" consist of one or two privately owned vehicles. According to the director of transport, the whole province only has about 40 functioning trucks and about 30 privately owned passenger transport vehicles. There is no commercial banking in the province. Satellite dishes continue to sprout up, even in rural areas. Given the dearth of legitimate economic activity, that and other displays of wealth often give rise to the suspicion that drug trafficking proceeds are at the base of such conspicuous consumption.

¶10. (U) Chaghcharan city has 400 kilowatts of generating capacity (enough for five hours of electricity a day) but at a price beyond the reach of most consumers. In December a group of consultants working for the Asian Development Bank identified a site 17 kms. east of Chaghcharan on the Hari Rud River that they deemed suitable for a 5 megawatt dam. The decision on whether to select Ghor as one of three provinces to get such a potentially transformative boost rests with Energy and Water Minister Ismail Khan. Ghor is not slated to receive any electricity from the giant Salma dam nearing completion in Herat Province, even though the water powering

the dam comes from Ghor and the dam is located practically on its border.

¶11. (U) The continuation last summer and fall of the Region's severe drought reinforced what has become a seasonal as well as permanent trickle of economic out-migration from Ghor to Herat, southern Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan. On the other hand, this winter's snowfall, looking to be somewhat greater than last year's, shows signs it might bring with it a reverse flow, at least in some areas and at least through the winter wheat harvest. Humanitarian assistance (including almost 6 metric tons so far in WFP aid) appears to have averted widespread hunger.

¶12. (U) Limited development work, some supported by USAID, continued, aimed at improving literacy, teacher training, health, and drinking water/irrigation. The Japanese finished work on five large schools in Lal district. Only about 90 of the 300 kms. of gravel roads into Chaghcharan originally slated by the UK and USAID for grading, culverting, and compacting were reconstructed before money ran out. Even so, they have served to remind Ghor residents of just how bad they have it with the rutted tracks that make up the remainder of the province's road network.

#### Society

¶13. (U) Morals and mores remain quite traditional in Ghor, but these tend to be leavened by an enthusiasm for education and a continuing hope for a better future, nurtured in turn by the province's generally good security environment. Unfortunately, at the same time both educational opportunity

KABUL 00000790 004 OF 005

as well as an otherwise fairly optimistic spirit are being undercut by poverty, something that likewise appears to be creating fertile ground for the perception that Kabul and the International Community are ignoring Ghor in favor of other areas of the country.

¶14. (U) The desire for schools and the acknowledgment of education as the path to a better future are palpable throughout the province. Schools usually beat out even clinics as top on villagers' wish lists. According to the director of education, 124,000 children and teenagers go to school, a figure he estimates takes in about 70 percent of the school-age population. Only 32 of 390 schools actually have a school building. Others are in tents or the open air, a circumstance that in traditional Ghor is said to create a hurdle for girls' attendance. All the same, fully half of the 14,000 first-time registrants for the upcoming school year are girls. Enrollment at Chaghcharan's girls' school (one of several in the province) has shot up from 400 to 1800 in the course of the last three years. (Some girls also attend mixed gender schools.) Only 600 of the province's 2,600 teachers have attended a teacher training institute. Kabul has approved in principle the opening of Ghor's first teacher training college in Chaghcharan, but the actual start-up appears to have been delayed for at least a year.

¶15. (U) The health care situation in Ghor has improved somewhat but overall remains extremely poor. Its 600,000-plus population is served by a single, six-doctor provincial hospital in Chaghcharan -- for many simply beyond their reach, given the expense, their own remoteness, the severe weather, and the mountainous terrain. In principle there are five comprehensive health care centers and a scattering of basic health care centers in the districts, but these too are often inaccessible to the affected population. Two NGOs, World Vision and Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (CHA), have been supporting these clinics, in the case of World Vision with the help of USAID funding. As of September 1, the EC assumed responsibility for supporting both NGOs. Despite the presence of three foreign-operated specialty clinics in the east of the province and sometimes

adequate supplies of medicine, the core problem remains a serious shortage of basic health care facilities throughout the province and a nagging difficulty in staffing the clinics that already exist. The current director of the government health care center in Lal district, for example, is a pharmacist; while Sharak's district administrator characterizes the clinic in his district center as nothing more than a first aid station.

¶16. (SBU) Comment: It is not without reason that Aristotle believed the mountains on Ghor's border marked the end of the earth, as Rory Stewart points out in "The Places in Between," the account of his walk across Ghor. Whether it's the three-day drive required to reach the province's capital from Kabul, the impossibility of recruiting a gynecologist for the provincial hospital even with the offer of premium pay, or Chaghcharan's nightly near black-out (with available city electricity costing more than 12 times the going rate in Herat) - living in Ghor really does feel like falling off the planet. Many believe it will take a revolutionary improvement in infrastructure (for example, the long sought east-west highway) to kick-start the development process that in turn will lead to a take-off in legitimate economic activity, inflow of human and material capital, burgeoning of governmental legitimacy, and atrophying of competing centers of power. In the meantime, the PRT and its national capitals, along with the few NGOs active in Ghor, are working hard to provide patient counsel and encouragement, resources to the limited extent available, and a link to other, outside sources of development funding. This last has become a priority even for the PRT's poloffs, given the promise such funds hold for preserving the province's precious stability and solidifying support for elected government.

KABUL 00000790 005 OF 005

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